

AN OLD BROADSIDE, WITH A REFERENCE TO THE  
THRONE OF CONGRESS.

(Plate IV.)

BY JULIUS F. SACHSE.

*(Read January 21, 1898.)*

A short time ago our efficient Librarian, Dr. I. Minis Hays, during his investigations among the miscellaneous property of the Society, discovered a bundle of old papers which bore the legend, "Of not much value." Upon opening the parcel almost the first paper examined proved to be a small German broadside over a century old. It was printed upon what is known as a quarto sheet, measuring seven by nine inches; it was without date or imprint, and the title simply told that it was a description of a silk serviette or handkerchief. Certainly not one to attract any special attention. Closer examination, however, showed that this advertisement or broadside was really the description of a fine specimen of the weaver's art, executed in silk damask or brocade, which had been made and distributed either in France or Germany, or perhaps in both countries, during the darkest days of the American struggle for freedom, with the express purpose of furthering America's interests in her battle for liberty.

The whole design appears to have been elaborate and symbolical, in which the portrait of Benjamin Franklin, Minister to the Court of France and President of the American Philosophical Society, occupied the most prominent position.

Diligent inquiry among scholars well versed in Revolutionary matters, both historical and pictorial, has failed in bringing to light any other notice of either the broadside or the allegorical handkerchief which was the basis for its publication; and it is but fair to assume that the printed sheet now brought to your notice, to say the least, is unique. The date of the making of our serviette, as it appears from the incidents and inscriptions woven in the fabric, must have been during the summer of 1778, evidently but a short time after the news of the British evacuation of Philadelphia reached the continent.

Another peculiarity of it is that it is couched in that peculiar kind of German, largely interspersed with French words and sentences,

which was prevalent in Germany at the period, when every petty princeling in that divided country aimed to maintain a court patterned after that of Louis XV of France.

We now come to the description of this symbolical relic as set forth in the broadside, and it is the fervent wish of the writer that this paper may be the means of bringing to light, or at least locating, one of these handkerchiefs of the Revolutionary period, should one have survived.

From the detailed description it appears that the handkerchief or serviette was of silk. In the centre was a rattlesnake, divided into thirteen parts, whereof the last part or tail end was supposed to be in a state of accretion, a prophetic allusion since realized. This symbol referred to the thirteen American Colonies then struggling for independence. It was patterned after one which appeared in Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* as early as 1754, when he printed in his paper the cut of a severed snake and the motto, "Unite or Die," to show the necessity of Colonial union against the French and Indians. In 1775 this emblem was printed at the head of the *Pennsylvania Journal*, and the idea of the resemblance between the Colonies and the rattlesnake was often brought up in the literature of the day.

The name of one of the different Colonies appeared over each segment. The broadside further goes on to state that this peculiar reptile was chosen as the symbol of the new nation because it was held to be the noblest of its genus: it never strikes without first giving due warning to its enemies, and for this reason, says the broadside, it has been emblazoned upon the arms and flags of the American Provinces. The word *Provinces* evidently refers to such provincial flags as bore a rattlesnake upon their folds. The most noted one of this series was the celebrated flag of Paul Jones, with its warning motto, "Don't Tread on Me."

Within the circle formed upon the handkerchief by the segments of a divided rattlesnake was portrayed a large globe upon a pedestal, so turned as to show North America. Within the outlines of the continent was prominently displayed a portrait of Benjamin Franklin, Ambassador at the Court of France, beneath which appeared the legend, "The Wonder of Our Times." Above this portrait appeared the throne of Congress, together with the Book of the Law and a drawn sword, symbolizing the supreme power. Upon the pages of this book were inscribed, *Les Treize Provinces Unies*.

(The Thirteen United Provinces) and *Indépendance le 4 Juillet, 1776* (Independence, July 4, 1776). In the foreground appeared a palmetto tree, upon both sides of which were placed the flags of France, to indicate the treaty so lately negotiated with that country.

A wreath of laurel formed the outside border of the handkerchief, to signify the reward of bravery. The four corners were interlaced with the lilies of France, which the broadside informs us also formed a part of the arms of the United Colonies. Here again we have an allusion to at least one of the many flags carried during the early part of the Revolution, prior to the adoption of the Stars and Stripes.

As corner-pieces there appear to have been four allegorical designs, whose chief *motive* were leading commanders in the armies of the United Colonies. The different Generals were supported by the goddess Minerva and surrounded by trophies of war and figures representing Prudence, Courage and Strength.

In the first medallion we have Washington ; upon his left the god Mars who, with his sword, strikes off the shackles from a slave and announces to him emancipation, while he crushed under foot slavery and envy.

Upon Washington's right was Minerva, extending toward him a wreath of oak as an emblem of strength. Genius reclines at her feet and proclaims peace. The legend over this medallion, *Général Washington Il a peu d'Égaulx en Bravoure, Prudence et dans l'Art Militaire*, informs the world that General Washington has but few equals in courage, prudence and the military art.

The second medallion shows a portrait of General Charles Lee. At his side are divers American prisoners of war bewailing their fate, and, pointing to the British arms, they implore Mars for succor. General Lee's late career is indicated by a dungeon upon whose walls are exhibited his arms, accoutrements and chains. The accompanying legend, *Général Lee, Tantot Vainqueur Tantot Vaincu*, signifies, "Betimes Conqueror, betimes Conquered."

The third medallion contains a profile of General Richard Montgomery. It is flanked by Sorrow, who points to an urn containing the ashes of the patriot. Below the portrait are seen a coffin and a monument. A mourning genius, with torch reversed, beside the cenotaph, represents death. Mars consoles him by pointing with his sword to a battle scene in the distance. The allegory is explained

by the legend, *General Montgomery, [sic] Thou do'st fall, but Freedom shall build her Throne on thy Grave.*

The central figure of the fourth medallion is General Gates, supported by Wisdom and Liberty, whereof the latter points with Mercury's wand toward the naval and military forces of the United Provinces. The fertility and affluence of our country are indicated by a scene on the river Nile. Above all appears the legend, *General Gates, Vainqueur de ses Ennemis* (General Gates, Vanquisher of his Enemies).

In connection with these four medallions there remain to be noticed four battle scenes ingeniously wrought into the fabric.

1. The battle of Quebec, where General Montgomery was killed. (*La Bataille devant Québec, où le Général Montgomery fut tué.*)

2. The battle of Trenton, where the Hessian troops were defeated December 25, 1776. Curiously enough our broadside gives the credit for the victory to General Lee: *La Bataille de Trentvice, où les Hessois furent défaits par le Général Lee, le 26 Decembre, 1776.*

3. The battle of Saratoga, October 17, 1777, showing the surrender of Lord Burgoyne to General Gates. The legend reads: *La Bataille de Saratoga, le 17 d' October, 1777, dans laquelle le Général Bourgoyne fut fait Prisonnier par le Général Gates.*

4. The retreat of the British from Philadelphia by way of the Jerseys June, 1778. With the inscription: *Les Troupes Angloises se retirent de Philadelphia à Jerseys l'an 1768 [sic].*

Finally, there is shown a horizon with forked lightning, from which descend two crowns, each formed of thirteen parts, one divided, the other united; emblematical of the dependence and independence of the North American Colonies.

From the above description it will be seen that this specimen of the textile art was one of no mean order, either in its poetical conception or the artistic execution. It further brings to our knowledge a heretofore unknown means used to interest foreign people of the better classes in our favor during what may well be called the critical time of our revolutionary struggle.

Historically, our old broadside is of the greatest importance in one particular, especially so at this time, when the old State House and Independence Hall are undergoing another siege of "restoration;" our broadside gives us a definite clue to a representation of a hitherto forgotten or overlooked accessory to the furnishings of the east room of the State House.

I allude to the canopied throne in Independence Hall, a piece of ornamental furniture occupied by the Speaker of the Continental Congress at the time when Independence was declared, and which remained a feature of the historic room until some time after the Revolution.

Nothing can be farther from our idea of the birth of American liberty than the introduction upon the scene of a throne with royal emblazonment. The mere suggestion would seem like a desecration of our most cherished sanctuary, where assembled the noble patriots who declared these Colonies free and independent. It certainly does seem like an incongruity to picture John Hancock, him of the bold signature, descending from a throne or anything that savored of monarchy, to affix his autograph to the immortal Declaration.

No painting or engraving, so far as known to the writer, portrays anything like such an accessory to the equipment of the chamber. No artist appears to have had the temerity to give us a true view of the Chamber of Assembly, with its gallery for the public and the ornate trappings over the windows and Speaker's chair. The memorable scene of signing the Declaration is generally depicted as one of extreme republican simplicity, in fact painfully so, giving the generations of the present day the impression that the interior of the State House, the finest public building in the Colonies, was as plain and devoid of ornamentation as a Quaker meeting-house, and in every case, as it now appears, incorrect in most vital detail.

Now, in the face of the accepted pictures of the Chamber of Assembly, or east room of the State House, we here have the statement of a picture of this throne, or, as it is called, "The Throne of Congress," supported by the Book of Laws and the Sword. And this picture appears as described on the handkerchief.

Unsupported by corroborative evidence, this statement would most likely, in the absence of the original, be received as a piece of artistic or poetic license on the part of the artist who sketched the design, and who for purposes of his own inserted a symbol of royalty so distasteful to patriots of all nations.

I will now read a piece of evidence in support of the existence of a throne in the east room. It was written by an eye-witness, the Prince de Broglie, who visited the State House in 1782:

"The State House, where Congress assembles, as does the Council of Pennsylvania, and where also the Courts of Justice are held,

is a building literally crushed by a huge massive tower, square and not very solid.

“Congress meets in a large room on the ground floor. The chamber is large, without any other ornament than a bad engraving of Montgomery, one of Washington, and a copy of the Declaration of Independence. It is furnished with thirteen tables, each covered with a green cloth. One of the representatives of each of the thirteen States sits during the session at one of these tables. The President of the Congress has his place in the middle of the hall upon a sort of a throne.”

Now the phrase, “sort of a throne,” might mean nothing, if coming from a modern American, more than a very dignified seat; but, coming as it does from a French nobleman of the ancient *regime*, it certainly suggests the idea of regal state. The least we can expect from it would be an ornamental chair on a dais surmounted by a canopy and ornamented with the symbols of the home government.

With these facts before us we may well assume that the symbol was an actual and not a typical one, and that it could only have been introduced into the general design by one familiar with the old Council Chamber.

We now come to another phase of the subject; how so elaborate a piece of furniture happened to be a part of the equipment of the Chamber at the time when the Continental Congress took the step which eventually made the Colonies an independent nation. The solution of this problem is comparatively easy. When it is taken into consideration that the room in which Congress met had for years been used by the Assembly of Pennsylvania, and was more or less elaborately equipped with fine furniture and hangings, there can be but little question that ample provision was made for the august Speaker and for the Governor when he was present on State occasions in the shape of an elaborate canopied dais, surmounted by the royal arms and other insignia of monarchical authority.

A somewhat similar arrangement with royal insignia over the seat of the Chief Justice ornamented the west room. The final disposition of these symbols of kingly authority appears in the issue of the *Pennsylvania Journal*, Wednesday, July 10, 1776, where we are told that on the evening of Monday, July 8, the day upon which the Declaration was publicly read, “Our late King’s coat of arms was brought from the hall in the State House and burned amidst the acclamations of a crowd of spectators.”

A throne with royal arms in Independence Hall! Words could hardly express a greater incongruity. Yet, to be historically correct, the learned Committee who have charge of the restoration of Independence Hall if they wish to place the ancient Chamber in the exact condition it was in on July 4, 1776 (and I believe that is the intention) will certainly have to introduce a canopied dais or throne in the eastern end of Independence Hall.

Another apparent historic incongruity in our old broadside is the legend which gives to General Charles Lee the credit for the capture of the Hessians at Trenton, when, as a matter of fact, that General was then a prisoner of war in the hands of the British. The explanation of this curious statement is that Lee claimed to have sent Washington the necessary information from New York, and formulated the plan of battle which brought about the capture of Rhal's forces. This, it appears, was believed in Europe to have been the case, and the design was evidently made and published before the news of the battle of Monmouth and the subsequent court-martial of Lee reached the continent.

In closing this paper I repeat the wish that its dissemination may bring to light, either at home or abroad, one of these symbolical compositions so curiously wrought in threads of silk and used in the interest of American Independence, the only description of which, so far as known, is the broadside found in the archives of the American Philosophical Society. Further, the finding of one of these serviettes would give to us the true design of the Throne of Congress, which for years was a feature of Independence Hall.

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*Stated Meeting, February 4, 1898.*

Vice-President SELLERS in the Chair.

Present, 12 members.

Acknowledgments of election to membership were received from Profs. C. F. W. McClure and Henry B. Fine.

The Standing Committees for the year, appointed by the President, under resolution of the Society, were announced, as follows:

*Finance.*—Philip C. Garrett, William V. McKean, Joel Cook.